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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President of Russia (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President. Putin

Interpreter: Peter Afanassenko
Notetakers: Jennifer Lyon, Deanna Kim, and
Diana Schmidt

DATE, TIME: May 30, 2006, 7:22 - 7:49 a.m. EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

President Putin: Hello. How is the weather in Washington? (U)

The President: The weather in Washington is hot. So is the politics. (U)

President Putin: It is better here. In Sochi, we only have plus 70 degrees Fahrenheit, or plus 30 degrees Celsius. (U)

The President: It's going to be nice and cool when we get to St. Petersburg. (U)

President Putin: I am looking forward to that meeting, and I would like to see you as soon as possible there. Igor Ivanov just returned from Tehran. He is in my office now, and I asked him to brief me on the results of the trip. I will listen first to what you have to say, and then I will tell you what I think of what he told me. (U)

The President: Igor has been in touch with Steve Hadley. We have been listening very carefully to what Igor has suggested about how to move the process forward. Like I told you, I have told Igor that we would like to solve this thing through diplomacy. My judgment is in order to do this, Russia and the U.S., as well as the EU, must be on the same page. I do not think diplomacy can work with the EU-3 without the U.S. and the Russians committed so the Iranians can see a united front. Therefore, I would like to explore this idea. The five of us saying in a clear voice, "If you honor this suspension agreement, the U.S. will come to the table, as well as the EU-3, to discuss

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with you the package of incentives in return for getting rid of your nuclear weapons program." If they say they will not suspend, I think it is important that we have an agreement before I come to the table that their refusal to suspend results in sanctions by the UN Security Council. That is why I am calling to get your reactions to these ideas. (S)

President Putin: The Chinese have a proverb: When two tigers are fighting in the valley, a smart and wise monkey is better off sitting and watching the fight. (U)

The President: Who is the monkey? You are not suggesting I am a monkey, are you? (U)

President Putin: I would rather be a monkey, and you are trying to lure me into the valley where the two tigers fight. It is rather difficult for me to present counter-arguments because your position seems to be so logical. Every one of us should take responsibility for the resolution of the situation. I believe your approach to be well conceived and well-thought out. Igor Ivanov said in his opinion there was careful optimism that they could agree to suspension of their nuclear activities provided negotiations continue and there is something of interest to them in the package. At a meeting of foreign ministers in Vienna on Thursday, it is important that the Chinese take part. They should not be discounted. They should participate in the process. This meeting will be quite important because I think it is supposed to develop a final package of incentives for Tehran should it step off its nuclear program and another package should it not discontinue enrichment. In Shanghai on 15 June, there will be a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Iran, India, Pakistan, and Mongolia are observers in this organization. But even now, we have information that President Ahmadinejad wants to attend and he wants to meet there. We, in principle, tried to avoid any meeting on a presidential level between the two countries. If in Vienna we manage to develop a common position, in principle we could use that meeting to lay down our position face-to-face directly, and that would be a good opportunity to involve the Chinese and to hear it from them saying they would like to participate in the process and support our group. Overall, I believe our involvement would bring a new substantive, positive element into the process. Russia would certainly support this proposal, and we consider it quite balanced and thorough. (S)

The President: I appreciate that. First of all, you have got to be involved. You have been involved in the beginning with discussions in 2001. Second of all, it was you who proposed the civilian nuclear program, which I supported and continue to support. We also have been involved. The question is can we be

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involved in a more formal way with the EU-3 to end the problem. They may not want to end it. I do not know. But we ought to give them the opportunity to end it. (S)

President Putin: Agreed, George. Let's do it the way you framed it in your proposal. (S)

The President: Okay, I appreciate that. It is very important for the world to see the U.S. and Russia working with the Europeans. I want to solve this thing. We are working together. Thank you very much for your generosity and your spirit of cooperation. (S)

President Putin: Thank you, George. If you have five more minutes, if you do not have any pressing meetings, I would like to say a couple words on the Middle East. (S)

The President: Please. (U)

President Putin: First of all, I would like to inform you of my meeting with Abbas in Sochi on 15 May. He was very much concerned over developments, and that if the crisis is not resolved, it will degenerate into a serious catastrophe. We provided \$10 million to them. These monies were given under the word of Abbas himself and under his control to be spent on humanitarian issues of medical supplies and equipment. We understand the American side objects in principle to paying civil servants. At the same time, Hamas is being paid because they are being financed by countries close by and by cash changing hands - tens of millions of dollars every month - which resulted in a fact I learned after Abbas left me. Part of the security services ran from Abbas to Hamas. It weakened Abbas. I draw your attention to this circumstance. I do not think anyone has an interest in further weakening Abbas because you are supporting him. He said - I do not know what he really thinks - but he said it so much, that he would continue to insist on the formation of a coalition government of professionals or technicians. We consider it appropriate to help him in this. We are trying to work with the Iranians, with the Syrians, with Hamas, trying to convince them to meet Abbas halfway. I would like to know what your reading is of the situation, taking into account Olmert's visit and Abbas's request to form such a government. (S)

The President: Thank you very much, Vladimir. Thank you for your interest and meeting with Abbas, who I like. I like that you think that it is very important for Abbas to be strong. I talked to Olmert, who is a very good man and a person you will like, about reaching out to Abbas to try and help marginalize Hamas and get an agreement on a two-state solution. We have got people there trying to help Abbas organize security forces. We

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are trying to get aid directly to the Palestinian people. Therefore, we are not going to violate our pledge not to give money to the government run by Hamas. But, we do care about the people. I agree with you that it would be very helpful if we could get a two-state solution up and running. I hope you get to meet Olmert. You will like him as a person. He is a strong leader. I was impressed by his vision and his understanding that a partner in peace would be helpful. (S)

President Putin: I have not met with him yet. We only talked over the phone. We agreed to meet, and I am looking forward to meeting him in Moscow. If I meet Ahmadinejad, I will certainly call him, and if you could spare a few minutes, I will share the information with you - what he thinks, what his attitude is. (S)

The President: That would be great. I do not understand the man and what he really wants. (S)

President Putin: I wish he could understand himself. Then maybe we could understand him. (S)

The President: Just do not give him a big kiss publicly. (S)

President Putin: No, big kisses only for you when you come. (S)

The President: We will visit you the night before the G8, as I understand it. (U)

President Putin: That is right. We will have an opportunity to have a calm talk and to take it easy for a couple hours. Best regards to your family and to your parents. (U)

The President: Thanks, Vladimir. Very good talking to you. Very good conversation. I look forward to seeing you. (U)

President Putin: Thanks for calling. I hug you. Bye. (U)

The President: Bye, buddy. (U)

-- End of Conversation --